Interview with Richard H. Morefield

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

RICHARD H. MOREFIELD

Interviewed by: William Morgan

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Q: This is an interview with Richard Morefield, recently retired from the Foreign Service, by William Morgan, also retired. And the interview is on the 18th of April, 1990, in my own home.

Okay, Dick. Before we get too far into this, let's summarize, pretty much, how your service in the Service began in 1956. And you retired, just recently?

MOREFIELD: May of last year.

Q: May of 1989. In that, you had a very distinguished career, largely in commercial and consular work, and largely, also, in Latin America, but also in Europe. And we were together—well, we first met each other as inspectors, back in the mid-70's.

Now, first of all, let's start off with you, Dick. Tell us, perhaps from the beginning, what brought you to the Foreign Service?

MOREFIELD: I'm from a Mexican-American family. My mother came to the United States, from Mexico, when she was a young girl. I was raised in San Diego. When I went off to the University of San Francisco, initially I had hoped to become a lawyer. When I went to

graduate school I switched to history. It is really a coincidence how I came into the Foreign Service.

In my first year at the University of San Francisco, I had to write, as part of a Freshman English course, a paper on any career. Because the Foreign Service Act of '46 had recently been passed, there was a lot of material available. And I wrote on that.

So, consequently, I had written something as a freshman about the new Foreign Service. When, in my senior year there was the opportunity to take the Foreign Service exam in San Francisco, I was urged by one of my college professors, who had been in the OSS, to take it “just in case,” as he said.

This was a three-day exam; I think, probably, the last time it was given. And I was, literally, in the middle of the second day when I got my orders calling me into service for the Korean War.

When I came back, and I was at Berkeley, they again offered the Foreign Service exam in San Francisco. And it was, I think, one of the first of the one-day exams. And again, just in case, I took it. I was able to pass. And in the interim, while I was going on with my graduate studies, I got married.

And so when I was offered a chance to come in the Foreign Service, it was at a very opportune time.

Q: One small technical question, in case there are some potential junior officers out there wondering about what happens on day two. You mean you were literally taken away from the exam by the military?

MOREFIELD: No, I got the notification to report.

Q: So you knew there wasn't really any—

MOREFIELD: But I also knew, that the Department was not asking for deferrals. This was one of the things that the Department was very careful not to do in World War II, and also during the Korean War, and even for reserve duty later on.

Q: Hopefully, that type of experience doesn't continue now, for the immediate future.

Dick, one of the many things you've done—other than your several assignments in Latin America, including a lengthy assignment in Mexico and Colombia and other places—that we'll want to hear more about, is that infamous assignment you had in the Middle East, in a country called Iran, where, unfortunately, as consul general, you found yourself one day, when a certain group of young students decided they'd like to possess the embassy.

I know everyone has heard many things. And those that were alert to it at the time were following it day by day. But how about sharing with us any particular things you feel the audience here—that would be reading this sort of material—would like, particularly from a historical standpoint—or any way you want to talk about it?

MOREFIELD: I think you have to realize why I went. I had taken the consular assignment in Bogot# because I had told Barbara Watson that the consular service needed to focus on management. That is, at large posts, where a large percentage of our resources were dedicated to consular work, management and motivation of the junior officers should be a high priority.

Q: I'm glad you turned my question around, because in fact, that subject is what brought us together when we were inspectors. I should tell the listener, the reader, that when we were inspectors together—and I was largely inspecting consular sections—and Dick, you and I were together in the Philippines, in Manila, at one time. And we got to be good friends.

And, also, maybe, you got to know a little bit more about consular—in terms of the management—when it was, particularly, a very large post. And then you thought about going, perhaps, back . . .

MOREFIELD: Well, I had made the point about management even before. I think it was one of the reasons why I was selected to go to the Philippines. On those previous inspections, where I had been doing the consular function, I had apparently been paying attention to it in a way that, perhaps, some of the others had not.

Q: You had rather extensive experience by that time, didn't you? You had served in consular positions in Barranquilla and in Oslo.

MOREFIELD: And at that time, Oslo was the third-largest non-immigrant-visa post in the world. As a result, when there was a need to change CGs in Bogot#—and Barbara, who is very good at turning around words—

Q: Let's reminds those few, that might not know, Barbara Watson, at the time, was the assistant secretary of state for consular affairs, and was "mama consul" from way back.

MOREFIELD: Yes, and she, basically, said for me to put my money where my mouth was. [Laughter] And asked me to go off to Bogot#. To put it into perspective, from the time the new embassy building had been planned, to the time we moved in, the embassy consular section changed from one principal consular officer and a junior officer and three locals, to a CG and 11 officers and 20-some locals. I also had personal reasons at the time for a quick change of assignments.

Q: Bogot# had both visa and the emerging drug problem?

MOREFIELD: Both. It was at a time when, as the change in the law, there was a demand to issue a backlog of 15,000 immigrant visas.

Q: Would you remember what that—

MOREFIELD: As a result of my going to Bogot#, and doing a good job, I think, in motivating and going through a very difficult transition period, I got a call from Barbara Watson; would I consider going to Iran?

Q: Which we take as a compliment, and perhaps, other things, too, in retrospect. [Laughter]

MOREFIELD: It is very hard to resist when a very strong-willed assistant secretary wants to twist your arm.

Q: Right, and does it well.

MOREFIELD: Yes.

Q: "My dear." [Laughter]

MOREFIELD: One of the things you could say in response, "Well, why me?" The U.S. Government and the State Department, at times, may be dumb. But it's not stupid. And when it was clear that the revolution had succeeded, and there was a need to come to some kind of accommodation with the new revolutionary government, it was also clear that the corps of people who had been Farsi trained, who had been identified with the Shah's regime, just couldn't exist with the new government.

The people that we kept there were young officers that had been in some of the consulates, who had contact with the general population, rather than with the palace procedures.

Q: Had others been in the mill, if you will—in the pipeline?

MOREFIELD: One of the problems is that it takes 44 weeks to get through Farsi. While the Department had been making a strong effort in order to get new officers to Iran, they didn't have one to run the consular section.

In one of the early meetings with the revolutionary government, they told us that there were going to be a number of criteria on which our relations with them were going to be judged.

One was military spare parts. And, surprisingly, the second one was student visas.

Q: Oh, yes. I say "oh, yes," Dick, because I remind you that before you got there, by about two or three years, I inspected that distinguished post. And I must say, I got some insights into what they were interested in and visas was out there, number one.

MOREFIELD: I think it's insightful as to why. In Iran they had the French baccalaureate system, in which they would graduate about 135,000 high school students a year. And, of which, they could train farther, in country no more than about 35,000.

Q: Because the universities there were so few.

MOREFIELD: So they did have a problem. They had the 100,000 people who had passed the exam, plus all those who had not passed the exam, but who still wanted some kind of additional training.

Q: Plus a society that was saying, "This is the role of the future. This is the way we're going to be a great Iran."

MOREFIELD: Yes. So there was a great demand to have students going overseas. And this, also, placed a dilemma on the students. [Brief interruption]

This, I think, has implications as to the dilemmas that some of the students had after the revolution.

Q: Frustration?

MOREFIELD: One of the problems was that, with the possible exception of doctors, an Iranian student could do better going back to Iran after he had had his degree, than he could by staying in the U.S. The Shah was very good at co-opting people. In effect, bringing them into the system. And this was part of the frustration for those students who did go back.

Q: I think we'd better get you placed historically, Dick. When did you actually arrive there and what was it, in terms of?

MOREFIELD: I arrived at the end of July in '79.

Q: And when was the occupation of the embassy?

MOREFIELD: November 4th of '79, also.

Q: So you were there—

MOREFIELD: Just a few months.

Q: Just a few months, as consul general?

MOREFIELD: As consul general. There was great pressure on many of these students, who were abroad, who had to drop out. Many of the students in the United States, who were adamant opponents, were those who had failed their academic training in the U.S. and, basically, couldn't go back to Iran. They had lost face, if you will.

It also presented a dilemma once the revolution came for the students. Did they stay abroad in schooling, to learn the skills and training that the new revolution needed, and give up the opportunity to affect the social changes in Iran; or did they go back in an attempt to participate in the rapid social changes, but give up the opportunity to learn the skills that that revolution needed?

And that was a dilemma. And my own personal opinion was, I could not fault an Iranian student for choosing either one of those two things.

Q: Of course, also, they didn't have the clairvoyance of knowing what was going to really happen.

MOREFIELD: What I could not stand was the ones who decided they were going to pull a copout. Because, very frankly, if they weren't willing to go back and fight for what they wanted for a new Iran, they weren't particularly good Iranians, and they certainly weren't going to be good Americans.

Q: In that short period, that you were in charge, how were you able to manage this situation; literally physically, the arrangement of the embassy and staff?

MOREFIELD: Well, one of the things that had happened was, as part of the February, Valentine's Day takeover—

Q: The preliminary takeover.

MOREFIELD: Yes, the preliminary takeover. We had withdrawn from the consulate, which was off the compound.

Q: Way off the compound, in bad physical shape.

MOREFIELD: There was a decision to renovate what had been the embassy cafeteria into a new consular division. Incidentally, that was an indication of how the Department can move when there is a need to.

Q: Only when they get occupied, maybe, in the literal and figurative sense. [Laughter]

MOREFIELD: The building was designed, renovated, and brought to completion. And we opened for business on my 50th birthday, September 9th.

Q: So you arrived before it was fully opened?

MOREFIELD: For the first couple of months, I was acting as the equivalent of an assistant GSO, to help make sure that the work went on as quickly as possible.

In that interim period, upon the insistence of the foreign ministry, we accepted 50 student-visa applications a day, that were sent over as referrals from the foreign ministry.

Q: In addition to all the students that were at the front door?

MOREFIELD: We weren't taking anybody at the front door.

Q: Oh, you weren't taking anybody at the front door?

MOREFIELD: So when we opened, I said, “We will take everybody first come, first serve, at the front door. And we will abolish this referral system.”

Q: So it was really a control system, I presume, by the foreign ministry?

MOREFIELD: Of course. What happened was, the students blockaded the entrance and said, “If we don't get special preference, we will make it impossible for anybody to come in.”

Q: Are we talking of hundreds and hundreds of—

MOREFIELD: The first day we opened, there were 10,000 of them.

Q: Oh, my God!

MOREFIELD: We refused to set up an administrative waiting list and I told the police, “It is your job to control the mob. I will take them first come, first serve.”

Q: And did they get in line?

MOREFIELD: They organized themselves in groups of 50, with a leader. They gave the lists of each group to the police. It was also very interesting that, nevertheless, the same people would come back day after day. They were able with Backsheesh to get into the front of the line again. And because of pressure from the foreign ministry we continued the 50-a-day referrals.

Q: In addition to those that came in through the front door?

MOREFIELD: In addition to those at the front door.

Q: So those were, kind of, extra screened with influence, shall we say? [Laughter]

MOREFIELD: Yes.

Q: The minister's son.

MOREFIELD: That kind of thing. Then we also had another way of special access. It was clear that there was no way in which we were going to be able to see everybody every day. So at 4:00 we would take those people who had an emergency. We said “emergency” is a life threatening illness or a real personal or business emergency. And we made a

decision, on the spot. We had, two windows that we kept open until the whole line went through.

Q: How many windows did you have for visa applicants?

MOREFIELD: We had seven.

Q: How many officers were there?

MOREFIELD: I had 11 in the section, but I had 7 doing non-immigrant visas.

Q: And FSNs?

MOREFIELD: I don't remember the number.

Q: But maybe 20-something? They were the same ones? The revolution hadn't brought about a—

MOREFIELD: No. This was one of the problems that we'd had there. As you know, there had been an Armenian “Mafia” among the FSNs. There was a large percentage of Armenians, who had traditionally functioned as key people among the Embassy FSNs. It was very clear that we could no longer continue to hire predominantly from one group in Iran.

But when there were replacement openings, I couldn't tell the FSN personnel people, who were Armenian “Send me only Shiite Persians.” But I would continue to go through the applicants until we got a better balance.

Q: Are you saying you had a lot of new employees, at this time?

MOREFIELD: No, not many.

Q: So you still had experienced people?

MOREFIELD: I still had experienced FSNs, yes. A very interesting thing is that very quickly my vice consuls got a reputation as to who was hard and who was soft. And so, one of the things—

Q: Not unique to Tehran. [Laughter]

MOREFIELD: They would sell a diagram of inside, that would say, “Don't go to window 2. Go to window 5. Stay away from window 4.” [Laughter] Consequently, every half an hour we would switch the people around.

It got to be very, very interesting as to the demand for emergency medical treatment. We came to the decision that we could not make a decision that “emergency medical” meant that it only could be done in the United States. We couldn't go that far. We had to say only that it had to be a real emergency.

I insisted that there had to be a prognosis for cure. I didn't want people going to the United States to go on dialysis machines, for example. And, consequently, we weren't going to go for orthopedic fitting of wooden legs or anything like that. That, I felt, was outside an emergency.

But other than that, the only thing I wanted was, as I say, a diagnosis from a U.S. doctor, prognosis, and some indication that financial matters had been taken care of.

Q: Cynical Morgan smells the word, “You want a document, I'll get you a document,” namely, fraud. In general, how did you look, in that limited period of a few months, at fraud in Tehran—Dashiki—what do you call them, grades, and that sort of thing?

MOREFIELD: We found that I-20s could be purchased. In a couple of cases we blew the whistle on schools that had a bad reputation. In some cases it was because the school really didn't understand what was involved. For example, they didn't understand that

they were supposed to have made a decision as to the capability of this person's English language.

Q: In your extensive consular experience, would you say that Tehran, maybe, was just about average in fraud?

MOREFIELD: I think so. I think so.

Q: How about in immigrant visas? You talked about non-immigrants. I presume the immigrants were still flowing, and maybe some refugees, some Kurds, or whatever?

MOREFIELD: One of the problems with the Kurds was that, unfortunately, they really didn't know how to manipulate, in the good sense of the word, our immigrant-visa section. There were these Kurds, who had skills that were in demand, where they could have gotten—

Q: Refugee status?

MOREFIELD: Even more than refugee status. They could have gotten immigrant visas. They could have qualified as auto mechanics, as carpenters. And, very quickly, that pool of refugees could have been drawn down.

But because they didn't understand the system—and even the people in the United States, and even the lawyers in the United States didn't. The lawyers, to my mind, failed, as they had done so often, in that they did not tell the applicant how to obtain a benefit of the law.

In many ways, my junior officers were better versed at serving the needs of an applicant, because they were to make a decision: “Was this person entitled to a benefit of the law? And if so, how does he go about to get it.”

Q: I would say that most consular officers would agree with that formulation; that the consular officer—the junior officer, especially, knows better, perhaps, than the lawyers how best to help under the law.

MOREFIELD: This was one of the things that happened when I was in Bogot#. There had been this large backlog of immigrant visas, and there was great pressure from a number of the immigration lawyers. After several months I went to talk to them, I said: “In the nine months I've been in Bogot# despite all the advisory opinions that we have sent in, my vice consuls had been overturned, on a point of law, only once. And yet, a week didn't go by, in which a immigration lawyer, who supposedly knew the law, not only gives incorrect information, but he gives it in a form that it damages the rights of his client.”

Q: So I could sum up, perhaps, your views of lawyers in these cases was not at the top of the list?

MOREFIELD: Yet, I don't think the visa lawyer and the consular officer are in an adversarial relationship.

Q: You think they are or they are not?

MOREFIELD: They are not. And, consequently, often an applicant doesn't have a need for a lawyer. I do think there often is a need, because of the way our immigrant visa processing system is set up for an applicant to have somebody to explain the entire process.

Q: Because it, also, is often a paper trail, as well.

MOREFIELD: That's right.

Q: And they don't know what the papers mean. They don't know what the words mean, often times.

MOREFIELD: But I really don't think that an applicant needs a lawyer to defend his interests under the law before a consular officer.

Q: Maybe they need them the same way we need tax lawyers. We think we need them because we don't understand the tax laws.

MOREFIELD: That's a very good point. One of the things I said to the lawyers is, “I'm perfectly willing to make immigration law a specialty, just like tax law. But I would also insist that, if you will, the reverse coin. There are certain things which you don't have to be a lawyer to do to serve a client in income tax matters. And there ought to be very many things in which a knowledgeable, trained person who is not a lawyer could handle for a client.”

Likewise, if you are a tax lawyer and you consistently and repeatedly lead your client down paths which are not fruitful . . .

Q: But pay off. [Laughter]

MOREFIELD: . . . but pay off—basically, practice barratry, using the law to create fees—you should be sanctioned.

Q: There is a parallel “pressure,”—if you want to use that word, and I guess it's a good word—from a different direction than lawyers, and that's from Congress. I would certainly think in Tehran, in those few months before you were taken captive, and in South America, there must have been a lot of congressional intervention; maybe in American services, prisoners, drugs?

MOREFIELD: Well, one of the statistics, as I remember when I was in Bogot#, in one month I got 750 congressional inquiries.

Q: And all kinds: visas, drugs?

MOREFIELD: Visas, drugs. In less than ten, was there any American-citizen interest.

Q: Ah!

MOREFIELD: Less than 100, there wasn't even a legal, permanent resident in the United States.

Q: Who were these people asking?

MOREFIELD: They were illegal aliens in the United States, who went to “their congressmen.” [Laughter]

Q: So they were easier to answer?

MOREFIELD: Yes, but the inquires didn't bother me. I think it's appropriate that you should be able to tell this person, “This is what the status is,” and so forth.

Q: Do you think that's all they really wanted to know, the congressmen?

MOREFIELD: I think that often that is all the congressmen wanted to know. And an experienced officer soon was able to spot the cases in which more was needed.

Q: You never had any famous ones, that sort of sent you up the wall?

MOREFIELD: Oh, I had one, in which a congressman who was one a b#te noire of the Department made an accusation of anti-Semitism against one of my vice consuls. I was able to write back and say, “Dear Mr. Congressman, I suggest you make inquiry of your constituent, Rabbi So and So, the brother of the consular officer involved.” [Laughter]

Q: That was one of the more fun ones. That's unusual, that such an accusation would be made by the congressman. Of course, it was really a constituent, I suppose, that was making it?

MOREFIELD: It's the constituent. And that is, I think, the point that you were trying to make, that often, the congressman only wants information. And wants a reasonable answer, fairly quickly, in order to respond.

Q: I found that in visa work, certainly. Almost without exception. Almost literally without exception. But not in American services. Particularly arrested Americans on drugs. How about drawing now into your American services experience?

MOREFIELD: In Bogot#, at the time I arrived, we had over 100 Americans . . .

Q: In jail?

MOREFIELD: . . . in jail.

Q: And again, what's the time frame here?

MOREFIELD: This was in '76.

Q: Seventy-six, that you arrived.

MOREFIELD: I characterize the American-prisoner category into various phases. The first phase was, basically, the tourist, who went down there and fell among thieves, if you will.

The second generation was, what I call, the semipro. The young man who's talking to his fraternity at Berkeley, or on the beach at Santa Monica, or something. And he says, “Hey, I'm going down to X country.” And, “Give me $100 and I'll come back with a pack of the good stuff for you.”

Q: The amateur smuggler, maybe.

MOREFIELD: The amateur/semipro, if you will. The third generation were the professionals. The 100 that were there when I came were of the second category. They were caught with more than for their own personal use; they were, basically, semi-pros.

Q: All are innocent until proved guilty, even in Colombia. But would you say some of those were really innocent?

MOREFIELD: No.

Q: In other words, Colombia police and laws fairly—

MOREFIELD: Well, in this one famous case there was a congressman who insisted; “For God's sake, bring this man to trial,” and so forth. The Colombian system had the French system of investigative judges. And there was a very interesting quirk in the Colombian law, that once you had served two-thirds of the minimum sentence for an offense, you could be released on parole.

Q: Paroled in that country, or could you—

MOREFIELD: Paroled in that country.

Q: So you couldn't leave Colombia?

MOREFIELD: Well, but they would.

Q: Yes, sure. Just break the law.

MOREFIELD: And what happens was, that it meant that you weren't convicted.

Q: Ah! No record?

MOREFIELD: There's no record of a conviction.

Q: Criminal record.

MOREFIELD: You could honestly say, “I have not been convicted of an offense.” [Laughter] You couldn't lose anything.

Q: Except life. I mean, part of your life.

MOREFIELD: No, what happened is—because if you pushed your case to trial you might get more than the minimum sentence.

Q: I see. What are we talking about? Two, three years, maybe?

MOREFIELD: At that time they were doing, generally, five years. So they were talking, maybe, three with time off for good behavior.

Q: And prisons were liveable?

MOREFIELD: Some of the rural ones were not the best. But what happened is, by that time, we had the visitation program, where we were active in going and meeting and taking, not only food supplements, but making sure they had medical care and so forth. This was a very interesting time for the consular service. And especially for junior officers.

Q: Tell us a little bit about this, because I agree with you 100%. It's almost a revolution, in some ways. Tell us a little bit more about the direction you got from Washington on the visitation program, the number of officers involved, what it meant from a manpower standpoint.

MOREFIELD: Well at that time it was very clear we had to take extraordinary efforts to see them as soon as possible. Under Colombian law we did not have to be notified until they were arraigned. And they had, as I remember, five days in which to do it.

Q: Did you have to protest violations of that?

MOREFIELD: We did. But what usually happened was, they would notify us but they wouldn't allow access until, generally, the second or third day.

Q: Which is not too bad.

MOREFIELD: And then, at least initially, we had to see them once a month; at least once a month.

Q: Were they spread all over the country?

MOREFIELD: Spread all over the country.

Q: Physically difficult to get to?

MOREFIELD: One of the problems was, some of these prisoners, who were street wise did not want to be transferred to a more centralized location, because they had come to terms with what was going on in the rural areas. They had made their arrangements; to have food brought in and so forth.

Q: Maybe a little drug on the side, too?

MOREFIELD: Yes. So, consequently, it was a very difficult thing for junior officers to carry out their duties when the prisoners didn't want to see them. Almost all of the junior officers had an initial assignment in consular affairs. And to have had academic training in Soviet affairs, and have a language—

Q: Or social affairs. [Laughter]

MOREFIELD: I had one young officer who was really exceptional, who said, “I didn't come in the Foreign Service to be a social worker.”

And I said, “Unfortunately, that's what you are.” I think it is also an indication of what changed in, what I would call, American-citizen services.

Q: From what to what?

MOREFIELD: Well, it was clear that, when I first came in, American-citizen services was, basically, a passport service and occasional notary.

Q: And a veteran's check.

MOREFIELD: And a Social Security check, once in a while. Very quickly American-citizen services changed into the offshore reflection of all of the services provided by the government.

Q: Welfare services.

MOREFIELD: Not only welfare services, but any kind of service. We became the reflection of the kind of service that they expected not only from their federal government, but from their state government, from their local governments, and so forth. And that required a change in attitude.

Q: And methodology.

MOREFIELD: I almost had to be that no matter how bizarre the request of an American walking in, you had to have a pretty good reason to deny it.

Q: But Dick, wasn't it also because, coincidentally, or maybe perforce of this, the drug problem was so escalating.

MOREFIELD: Yes.

Q: And, you know, the old drunken sailor, that the consulate traditionally protected. [Laughter]

MOREFIELD: The first time I ever made a prison visit is a good example of what happened. It was on Thanksgiving in Barranquilla. And was I called down to the local prison down there. And here was this drunken sailor, who was arrested for not paying the young lady that he had spent this night with.

Q: A good, old, maritime problem. My very first case in Beirut was a drunken sailor. Then it changed. [Laughter]

MOREFIELD: His point of view was that he had thought that his company and his buying drinks was sufficient compensation for her. And that was, sort of, the agreed price.

Q: And that was what year?

MOREFIELD: This was '58.

Q: This was Barranquilla. Ah, '58, yes.

MOREFIELD: By talking to the man, who was ten years older than I was at that time, and the young lady, we reached an agreement. And the man, went off to his ship again. It was clear, by the time I went to Bogot#, by the time I went to Tehran—

Q: Twenty years later.

MOREFIELD: —twenty years later—that the American-citizen services was the reflection of the consumerism society in the United States. And we were the reflection of the new theme providing a wider range of services to Americans overseas.

Q: Let's take that one step further, geographically, to Tehran and albeit those few months, tell us what kind of American service problems you had there.

MOREFIELD: One of the problems that I had in Tehran is a reflection of the extent of the change of providing American services. We have an obligation to provide services to American citizens, even when we may not have a right to under international law. I think that's most clearly seen in the case of dual nationals.

By the time I got there, most of the American citizens—who were there working with the military or with a oil company or with Bell Helicopter—had all left.

Q: Because of the situation?

MOREFIELD: Because of the situation.

Q: Were they expelled or was it just—

MOREFIELD: Well, they were gone.

Q: They were gone.

MOREFIELD: But there were a number of American women there, who were married to Iranians, and I tried to meet some of them when I got there.

Q: Dual Americans or native-born?

MOREFIELD: Under Iranian law, when they became married to an Iranian citizen they had to enter Iran on an Iranian passport. And the Iranian Government would not allow us to claim them as American citizens. Very clearly, we were going to document them as U.S. citizens when we could. We were going to document their children, if their children had a claim to American citizenship.But that is an indication of the kind of things where you really, often, can't go in and pound the table. I'm talking about relationships. Let me give you another example, again from Bogot#. We had a case where there was a

bombing, concurrent bombing, of the marine house—I mean security guard house—and the supreme court. And the bombing was done by a brother and sister.

The woman was a tri-national. She had Colombian, Argentine, and a claim to U.S. citizenship. Now, under a general rule you can't offer protection to a dual national when he's living in his own country. There was also another problem. Under Colombian law you become an adult when you're 16. This girl was 17.

It was important that I could go to the military authorities and say, “Look, I understand the position of the Colombian Government. But this is one case in which you need to be aware of our concerns, especially since she is a minor under U.S. law.”

Because of a previously established good relationship the military commander said, “Oh, I understand what you want. Here is a copy of the medical examination that we gave her within two hours of the time she was picked up. You will be allowed to see her.” And so forth. When it was all over, he said, “I don't understand why you are interested in protecting this young lady, who has tried to bomb part of the embassy.”

I said, “General, you don't understand. It is my obligation to make sure that her rights are respected. Very frankly, when you're finished with her, since she has violated U.S. law, we very well may want her, as well.”

Q: Dick, how did you feel, at the time, in that situation, in which you were, sort of, by definition, torn in the two directions? Protect the person? At the same time, get the person arrested?

MOREFIELD: It is even more clearly defined when you are involved in a case of drugs. I would tell my junior officers, “When the prisoner starts to tell you things, you have an obligation to tell him, 'Look, I don't want to know that. It is not going to make a difference in how I am going to react to you. And, very frankly, it is not to your advantage to make voluntary confessions to me as to guilt or innocence.'”

Q: If you received such a "confession," did you then feel compelled to turn it over immediately to DEA agents, for example, as many a prisoner accuses us of?

MOREFIELD: No. In fact, we were very careful to separate out what could be given to the DEA and what could not be given.

Q: Who made that decision? You alone?

MOREFIELD: No. There was good guidance from the Department. It was clear that this was a concern, that if it wasn't handled properly, was going to poison the well in our relations with Congress. It was going to poison our relations with the DEA.

Very frankly, having been in Guadalajara, where my main purpose for being there was to provide the atmosphere for the DEA's doing its thing there, I am convinced that it's important that you have a relationship with them, an honest relationship. And it is possible.

Q: And, at the same time, protect the American individual arrested.

MOREFIELD: Exactly.

Q: Sounds like a schizophrenic situation.

MOREFIELD: Well, but we're all schizophrenic. [Laughter]

Q: We're commissioned to be, by the Jesuits.

MOREFIELD: Yes. And I think that kind of judgment call . . .

Q: It's judgmental, isn't it?

MOREFIELD: And it is a maturity. Because you have to look at what was our purpose in looking after, say, a young drug trafficker—

Q: Prisoner.

MOREFIELD: Prisoner.

Q: Right, prisoner. Two-hundred-and-something years of protecting the American citizen abroad.

MOREFIELD: I think it came down to this: is that, sooner or later, that citizen was going to go back to the United States, where he was going to incorporated back into our society. And society had a vested interested in that person coming back in the best possible physical and emotional state, so that his transition back into society would be possible.

Q: And DEA agents, with whom you worked, in Guadalajara especially, had no problems understanding that?

MOREFIELD: Some of them did. After all their job was to catch them and put them away. I had no problem with that because we had different functions. Even if I did have a problem, it was clear that the law said we were to protect their interests.

Q: And you feel that the guidance from Washington on this was good? Up front, or did it come way after the fact?

MOREFIELD: Well, it's one of those things in which—like Alice and the Red Queen—you had to run very fast just to keep up. The situation was changing so quickly that, in many cases, it was only when there was a horrible example someplace that all of a sudden we would pull our act together. But we were running very fast.

Q: Because this turned out to be, x-number of years after you were there, a tremendous tragedy, namely, the execution by certain people, some of whom just had a doctor arrested in the United States, or dragged to the United States from Mexico. How many years after that was Kiki — what was his last name again?

MOREFIELD: Kiki Camarena was there when I was there.

Q: He was there when you were there? Tell us what you can, or want, about that.

MOREFIELD: My wife has said, and I think I agree with her, that probably my being there was a culmination of my career, otherwise. Because of my own son's murder and because of my incarceration in Iran, I was in a position to provide the kind of emotional support, not only to the family and to the other colleagues, but to the rest of the consulate.

Q: So his kidnapping and death took place while you were there?

MOREFIELD: His body was found on the tenth anniversary of my son's murder.

Q: Oh, dear. I think for the reader, the listener, we should make it clear that Dick's son was brutally executed as a young man—19, I think, in a 7-11 or a—

MOREFIELD: At a Roy Rogers.

Q: Roy Rogers, right here in the Northern Virginia area. This was in 19—

MOREFIELD: '76.

Q: Seventy-six, yes. And then, of course, his hostage days, that he's referring to, he'll get back to shortly. But those two things, the Department felt, really—and your wife, particularly, felt—contributed to your ability to help in this tremendous tragedy. Tell us briefly, for those that might not know what happened. It was a DEA agent.

MOREFIELD: The DEA agent was picked up and kidnapped as he walked out of the consulate to go have lunch with his wife. When I was notified the next morning, I said right up front, “The first priority of this consulate is to get him back.”

For those who don't know how police investigations go, they live on communications. We had around-the-clock communications, where my secretary, who was the part-time communicator, and one vice consul, who was a backup, did twelve hours on, twelve hours off for six weeks.

Q: How long was it before they discovered his body, or knew he was dead?

MOREFIELD: They found his body in March. So it was about six weeks.

Q: And through all that time, it was possible he was still alive?

MOREFIELD: We were pretty sure that with the kind of treatment he was going through, as the days went on, it was unlikely that he was still living. One thing that was important was the attitude we took with the Mexican Government. The governor was out of state when Kiki was taken.

Q: Governor of the state of?

MOREFIELD: Of Jalisco.

Q: For Guadalajara area?

MOREFIELD: Yes.

Q: And he had supervision over this. Or, at least, he was a principal?

MOREFIELD: Yes. I told him from the very beginning that he had to realize was this was an issue that would not go away. That the worst of all possible scenarios for the Mexican Government was that the case not be resolved, because they would be continually condemned in the worst possible terms.

Q: They would be guilty until proved otherwise.

MOREFIELD: I said, “Even in the unfortunate circumstance of some Mexican official being involved in this, it was to the advantage of the Mexican Government that you cut your losses, and, basically, resolve the case. Because until you do, it was going to be a festering wound.”

And his reaction was, “But we have had police officials killed in the line of duty.” I then said something, which I am proud to say was picked up and followed.

I said, “Governor, this man was an American official, accredited to the Mexican Government as a diplomat, assigned to my consulate to cooperate in a joint program with the Mexican Government. He was not killed in the process of helping a police raid. He was kidnapped walking out of the consulate.” I said, “If you don't understand the distinction. . .”

Q: Maybe he thought of him as a Mexican?

MOREFIELD: Well, no—but as a police officer. So it was important that from then on, I never referred to him as a DEA agent.

Q: He was a diplomat.

MOREFIELD: He was a member of my staff at the consulate. And I think that kind of support was important to DEA. That's the kind of support that I think you have to give; an ingrown, inherent belief in the importance of their activities.

I would say to the Mexicans, “Look, I was in Colombia at the beginning of the drug problems there, and you have a real problem. The one thing that can jeopardize the Mexican political-economic system is the drug traffic.”

Up until then, the official party, the PRI, had the ability to obtain a consensus within the party by co-opting, by assigning things. Consequently, there was no power structure outside the PRI that could, in effect, develop a competing political consensus. I argued

there were only three organizations in Mexico, which had national representation. The PAN was not one. It was a regional political party.

I said the three nationwide organizations were the PRI, the Catholic Church, and the drug traffickers. And that if the drug traffickers ever parlayed their money power into economic power, and into political power, the ability of the Mexican political system to come to a national consensus was going to be destroyed.

Q: Do you think this tragedy, and all that followed, in terms of the attention and some of the things that you spoke of, helped the Mexican Government make sure that that wouldn't happen, that that wouldn't be a route? Or is it still out there?

MOREFIELD: This occurred at a time when for a number of reasons Mexico was going through a very, very difficult economic restructuring.

Q: Again, this was 1984?

MOREFIELD: This was up through '88.

Q: Through '88? You were CG in Guadalajara from?

MOREFIELD: For two years, from '85 to '87.

Q: And then went on to Mexico City. So you carried on your awareness of all this into Mexico City, where you were what?

MOREFIELD: I was economic counselor.

Q: Economic counselor. Okay. So you got to see the economy of the drug trafficking. But back to the point that you were saying.

MOREFIELD: Previously they had sufficient resources to co-opt and to bring everybody into the system. When that economic model for a number of reasons ran out of steam—

and it had already run out of steam before the drop in oil prices—and then when you had the subsequent drop in oil prices, they were in real problems.

Q: Because that was an enormous chunk out of the economy, and the potential economy.

MOREFIELD: And to dedicate the resources to fight the drug traffickers at that time was a real statesman-like decision, and to the credit of the Mexican authorities.

Q: You're saying they did it?

MOREFIELD: They tried.

Q: Where do you think they are today?

MOREFIELD: They're still trying. And I think they are concerned over the social implications of that kind of illegal money floating around.

Q: Of which, the tragedy in Guadalajara really brought it out? Out of all evil comes good, maybe? Or was there a lesson there for them, that they learned?

MOREFIELD: I don't know what the Mexicans learned out of Guadalajara.

Q: Even from the capital? When you moved to the capital, you didn't get different insights?

MOREFIELD: It was an issue that continued all the time I was in Mexico City. It did not go away. It has still not gone away.

Q: No. We picked up a doctor.

MOREFIELD: To me it is very interesting that there is a task force in DEA to get the perpetrators.

Q: Understandable, but how do the Mexicans look at such an extraterritorial intrusion?

MOREFIELD: This has always been a problem in the attempt to enforce U.S. legislation overseas. DEA has a dilemma. They're a law-enforcement agency, which has responsibilities overseas, but does not have the authority. But you get, in a minor way, the same kind of things where you get a deputy sheriff from Dade County who goes over to the Bahamas and brings back somebody.

Q: Or into Canada. [Laughter]

MOREFIELD: Or into Canada; the famous example, into Canada. Or you get somebody from the LAPD that goes down into Mexico. There are ways in which to get prisoners across the border.

Q: Mr. Thornburgh's going there today or tomorrow, I think. He'll have an opportunity to explain the American way of doing this.

MOREFIELD: But unfortunately there's also the judicial ruling that just because the person was, if you will, shoved across the border, the courts do not have to consider this as a violation of his rights overseas. His rights begin once he's shoved through that border.

Q: When I inspected Mexico, I remember several DEA agents telling me they were very pleased when the American escaped into Mexico, because there he could get his due, with the exception of a few consular officers that guided the way once in a while. [Laughter] Back to the American protection in Tehran. You started to talk about it, in part, and then got off into—

MOREFIELD: How do you look out for the interests of a woman, who under the local law, has no claim to our protection? Those are the kind of cases where you earn your money.

Q: Talking about prisoners, what about the drug problem, which was there, and I presume was there when you were there?

MOREFIELD: I don't have any recollection of any American prisoners by the time I was there. I didn't see the inside of an Iranian prison until— [Laughter]

Q: Until you were made one. [Laughter] So the protection of Americans, in those few months before the captivity, were pretty-much dual nationals or citizenship?

MOREFIELD: Well, dual nationals, taking care of the property of people who had left things there. I had one case, where an American was concerned about getting his illegitimate son out.

Q: I guess what was behind my question was, not only the obvious protection of Americans, but given what happened in November, weren't there things like that beginning to happen, in the sense of Americans mistreated, maltreated?

MOREFIELD: No, because there weren't that many of them. This was strange.

Q: But fortunate.

MOREFIELD: But fortunate.

Q: So most of the Americans had, for obvious reasons, got out of the country? Certainly, those that would have, before, been your business customers. Well then, a certain day all those delightful visa applicants turned into bad guys? Or how did that happen? Do you want to tell us about the day in November?

MOREFIELD: There is an interesting point. One of the things I notice in your agenda that you're talking about in your study is the coordination or the integration of the consular section into the country team. Looking back, the fact that we did not spot that something was about to occur, just from the sheer number and the sheer panic of people fighting to get visas—

Q: Should have been an indication of what was—

MOREFIELD: Should have been an indication.

Q: Especially since you had a rehearsal on Valentine's.

MOREFIELD: Yes. What had happened was, on the first of November there had been a disturbance and there had been some spray painting on the walls. And when we got through that, we thought we were, sort of, over the hump, if you will.

Q: Was this something new, something isolated?

MOREFIELD: It was, I think, the anniversary of one of the previous serious riots and consequent deaths. The Iranians had the custom of commemorating such anniversaries. We should have been, I think, more aware that there were—

Q: "We" being the total mission?

MOREFIELD: "We" being the total mission.

Q: Do you want to talk about that relationship?

MOREFIELD: Well, we were trying very, very hard to find a way in which we could establish the kind of normal ties with the revolution.

Q: "We" being the whole mission objective? Let's get on with the new government.

MOREFIELD: The whole mission, yes. For example, any time there was a mullah that needed a visa to go get medical treatment, we would try and get him to be seen by a political officer—we were working very, very hard at that. But it's hard to tango when the other person wants to go sit out on the balcony, if you will. And it was a difficult time.

Q: In communications, government to government, as well as people to people?

MOREFIELD: Yes. To give you an example: later on, one of the guards was livid when he was describing the meeting with Brzezinski and the Iranian Foreign Minister in Algeria. I said, “But wait a minute. We have relations with the Soviet Union even when we didn't have diplomatic relations with the Red Chinese, we at least talked to them in Paris, and so forth.”

And he came back very quickly. “No. There is no reason for any American to talk to any Iranian official, except to subvert the revolution. There is no reason for any Iranian official to talk to any American official, except to betray the revolution.” When you have that kind of attitude it is very, very difficult.

Q: Conspiratorial, ideological?

MOREFIELD: Yes.

Q: And you take that as the example of widespread—

MOREFIELD: Of why it was so difficult to try and talk to them. And yet, I would say many of our people who were there could have intellectual sympathy, at least, with the revolution. The example I've used is that this, to my knowledge, was the first social revolution, certainly in modern times, that did not have to compromise, almost immediately, for lack of money.

There were a great number of social problems in Iran that were well known: the need to revitalize agriculture; the need to get away from this tremendous metropolis of Tehran that was, sopping up resource in the country; to do reforestation; to revitalize the irrigation system. All of these things were clearly in the Islamic tradition.

Q: Shiite fundamentalist tradition?

MOREFIELD: Yes. And were issues that could have been addressed.

Q: Weren't addressed?

MOREFIELD: The great tragedy was they were not addressed because of the desire to go back to, basically, a sixth-century Persian agricultural village.

Clearly, I'm not a specialist in Iran. But I think the downfall of the Shah came when he tried to achieve a modern Iran: “Modern” meaning that there would be the attributes of a modern government—social security, education, welfare—which up to then were all functions centered around the mosque; Iran, in that it was more than just the Persian Shiites. There was more to Iran than the Shiite Moslems. There was more to Iran than just the Persians. There was even a small Jewish community that went back there to the Babylonian captivity.

When I went to see the Armenian archbishop, he told me the revolutionary government was closing down his schools, was making it impossible for him to teach the children their language and their culture. And I saw this as a great tragedy. The equivalent of what we did to the blacks in the United States as slaves. They were not allowed to participate in the culture of the country. Yet, they were denied the opportunity to have their own. That was a dilemma that I saw in the Iranian revolution.

Q: With only a few months to make such observations, you, I suppose, relied an awful lot on the more-expert colleagues in the embassy, and your own local employees—your Foreign-Service-national employees.

The first part is back to the question of your relationship with the rest of the embassy; how you were as a unit? And then tell us, also, how you got with the FSNs.

MOREFIELD: We had a rather unique group of young political officers. They were very clearly the ones who were going to be the new generation of Near Eastern specialists. They had a good background in the culture and the historical tradition.

One of the great problems that we have, as the Foreign Service, is that we tend to think in three-year increments.

Q: A tour of duty. [Laughter]

MOREFIELD: And one of the problems with history repeating itself is that every time it does, the price goes up.

Q: It does, indeed.

MOREFIELD: And that one of the things you need is someone who can put this in the cultural or historical or political, traditional context and flow.

Q: And previous employees had—when the Shah fell—pretty much left?

MOREFIELD: Pretty much left. We had—

Q: A whole new crowd?

MOREFIELD: No, we had two of the consuls from constituent posts that—

Q: Tomseth had been—

MOREFIELD: We had Mike Matrinko. We had John Limbert. These were people who were able to put things into, I think, cultural and historical context.

Q: But how did they, with you and the consular section, albeit moving from one building to another, and so on—how did—

MOREFIELD: When you're that small a mission—we were very small—

Q: You'd reduced, what, 50%, maybe? More than that?

MOREFIELD: I think the official family went from over 1,000, down to under 100.

Q: Oh, my. Oh, my. Employees?

MOREFIELD: Employees.

Q: Yes. That's including Marines and—

MOREFIELD: Well, that includes a MAAG and—

Q: Yes, wow. That is a dramatic drop. Because of the February takeover?

MOREFIELD: Well, and because the larger mission was no longer appropriate.

Q: Yes, especially the military side.

MOREFIELD: We had two people in the economic-commercial section.

Q: So the consular section was the largest?

MOREFIELD: The consular section was the largest other than the military attach#s.

Q: How did you all work together, especially with this overwhelming problem coming up, that you didn't all foresee?

MOREFIELD: There was this interchange of impressions and ideas, not only during formal staff meetings, but elsewhere. We all lived either on the compound or very close to it. And so there was a lot of informal putting your feet up when things were over.

Q: And maybe with other diplomats, because there wasn't anybody else? There weren't Iranians, that you could meet with.

MOREFIELD: Because so many of our local employees had been, tarred with the brush of being with the Shah—especially in the military side—many of them had already left.

Q: Any of them taken away, to your knowledge?

MOREFIELD: Not when I was there. We had two or three key consular employees who stayed until the bitter end.

Q: FSNs?

MOREFIELD: FSNs.

Q: Including the one, who I understand, was a member of the secret force of the Shah's? No, he must have gone on. I can't remember his name, but he was—

MOREFIELD: That, by the way, gives me an opportunity to talk about what you can and cannot do with FSNs. As the work has expanded and changed, the role of what you're able to give to an FSN, especially in consular and commercial and economic work, has changed; certainly, when there are security considerations.

One of the ground rules is that you never put an FSN, no matter how trusted or how valuable, in a position where he can be pressured to give information that you don't want him to give.

Q: Don't hurt him by doing it.

MOREFIELD: That's an unfair burden to put onto an FSN. Because what are we doing? We're asking FSNs, living in their own country, in their own culture, to live and work with the standards of the U.S. Government.

Q: Which we are. In many ways we have to.

MOREFIELD: Yes. But in many cases, things which are ordinary to us are incomprehensible to another culture. And it's unfair to put an FSN in a position where he or she can be pressured, or can be tempted. A good example is in visa work.

Q: I was going to say. By definition, they're vulnerable.

MOREFIELD: Let me give you an example. In Bogot# there was a FSN who was processing the immigrant visa applications. She would start typing and then get to the question, “What are your travel plans?” And she would always say, “Have you already bought your ticket?” And if the applicant said, “Yes,” then it went on. If the person said, “No,” she would pull out a card and say, “Well, my sister works at this travel agency. You may want to go there.”

Q: Very natural in Colombia. Maybe it's natural in other places. [Laughter]

MOREFIELD: When I found out about this, I had to fire her. I found out that in the course of a year her sister had earned, in commissions, more than three times her sister's salary. And I said, “Here, clearly set out in the Embassy's employee guidelines it says you are not allowed to obtain a benefit as the result of your position.”

Q: Okay, that's the point. It was clear to her that under U.S. moral guidance or legal—it was clear?

MOREFIELD: But she said, “Oh, but everybody would have done it here.”

And I said, “Yes. That's precisely the point. There wasn't going to be one Colombian in a hundred who isn't going to believe that I am not a co-owner of that travel agency. And more than that, there isn't one American in a hundred who will understand the Colombian attitude.”

Q: That's right.

MOREFIELD: So you have to give enough supervision and enough controls so that you preclude that kind of opportunity.

Q: Supervision in the sense of trying to explain why we have such—in their cases—strict—

MOREFIELD: And it's a very difficult thing, because as a rule, our Foreign Service Nationals work hard—harder than they would in the local environment. They are very clearly better trained than they would have to be in another position locally.

A prime example—again, in Bogot#. Despite all of the hassles in getting an immigrant visa, or even a visitor's visa, it was easier to get a visa in the American Embassy than to get a passport from the Colombian Government. We treated them better than they were treated by their own government. But that was the standard that we had to set.

Q: That's a very important point of how we work with the FSN to get them to understand and protect them, if you will. Translate that into the Tehran situation. Was there some, perhaps, even more dramatic things there? Like political pressures?

MOREFIELD: I never got that. But, very clearly, when you have some of your key nationals related to key officials in the government, there's going to be problems.

Q: Could they talk with you? Did they feel free to talk with you about what was happening, of these dramatic changes?

MOREFIELD: To a certain extent, but I wasn't there that long.

Q: You weren't there, free, that long. [Laughter]

MOREFIELD: But setting standards to protect an FSN takes rather strange twists.

When I was in Norway we had a very large influx of American tourists, mainly of Norwegian extraction, that came in, in the summertime. There are more people who speak Norwegian in the United States than there are in Norway. But many of them speak Norwegian of 20 or 30 years ago. They have lost much of their facility.

Q: Warped, shall we say, by English?

MOREFIELD: One of the problems is the structure of Norwegian, it is hard to be superficially polite. And if you're not careful, you can give the impression of being brusque. As a result, we would get complaints, time after time, by Americans, that they had been treated rudely by a Foreign Service National.

Q: —linguistic, stylistic—

MOREFIELD: As a result, to protect them we had to say, “You will not speak Norwegian to an American citizen who walks in and begins in Norwegian—you will speak English.” [Laughter]

Q: So, at least, we don't have a cultural confrontation.

Dick, you alluded before to how you had started off in consular, and then found yourself going away from it a bit, back. And then going back into consular. Tell us what got you going back into consular again.

MOREFIELD: Well, one of the reasons was that my initial experiences in consular work were very satisfying, both personally and, I think, professionally. I came away with a good taste in my mouth for consular work, if you will.

Q: You didn't feel you'd been through too many mills?

MOREFIELD: No. And part of the reason for that was when I was in Oslo the chief of the consular section was an old-line staff officer who had his difficulties as an individual

officer but was a great consular officer. He gloried in the fact that junior officers that he had trained had passed him. He first taught me the idea that the role of a consular officer is not to deny, not to say no, but to provide a service if it is at all permissible under the law.

Q: Some would say that's an exception to the old staff-corps technician, who were often times looked at as very negative.

MOREFIELD: But he knew the law and he knew precisely what he was prohibited from doing. Because he did know what he could not do, he also knew the wide scope, where very honestly, you could provide services to Americans who needed them and who deserved them and who had a right to them.

Q: What you're saying then is, he trained you well and he motivated you well.

MOREFIELD: Yes.

Q: Set the right tone?

MOREFIELD: This occurred after I had been in Barranquilla, where I had followed George Phelan, another officer who was a good consular officer, in the sense that he knew his job, and where there was a good FSN staff. And so I had two good early experiences.

Q: And neither of them mills, in the sense of under tremendous, boring pressure.

MOREFIELD: No at Oslo at that time we were the third largest NIV-issuing post in the world. The Federal Benefits section was second only to Rome.

Q: Why did you have so many NIVs?

MOREFIELD: Because, as I say, Norwegians had a history of visiting the United States. Many Norwegian men rather than going to work on a boat—that traditionally plied, say,

between Hong Kong and Australia, and coming back once every 18 months to Norway—would go and become a carpenter in New York.

So again, 10% of the Norwegian budget was paid for by Social Security things. We were the largest Social Security post, outside of Rome, in Europe.

Q: And, of course, the mill in Europe is often like London, or Paris, where they're third-country nationals; where they're not French or English. And you had no DCMs.

MOREFIELD: The Norwegian Government did not want us to issue crew list visas. They did want individual seaman's visas. So we had a lot of relatively easy—

Q: Civilized consular issues.

MOREFIELD: Yes. For example, where you brought them in and sat them down in an office. It was a different world. But anyway, for a number of reasons, I came away with a good taste in my mouth about consular work. I think the techniques on asking questions, on interviewing, on listening to the answers—all of these became very useful on my later reporting.

One of the things you learn very quickly is, did they answer the question or was there an equivocation there? So the skills that I learned—on being able to write an advisory opinion, in which you very clearly set down what are the facts and separate out what is your opinion or your judgement—these are all things which served me in good stead later on.

Q: Before you leave those two excellent experiences as the basis of your good feeling for consular—so often though, the consular officer in those first two tours is made to feel off in the consular section, or down in the consular section, or somewhere different than the rest of us diplomats. I take it you didn't have those experiences?

MOREFIELD: Well, I was very lucky. First of all, I went to Barranquilla, which was a five-officer post. Which was, I think, a tremendous thing, in which, basically, we had one officer doing visas full time. I did citizenship, commercial, and following the USIA activities.

Q: A small post, in other words.

MOREFIELD: It's a small post, but in which all of the functions were being done.

Q: So there wasn't a separation between the consular section and the rest of the mission.

MOREFIELD: Then I went to Norway where we had a relatively small mission, in which the Consular section was very closely tied in with the rest of the mission. Partly this was because of the ambassador, Cliff Wharton, He was the one who gave me the first boost up the ladder, who was willing to pay attention to a junior officer in the consular section.

Q: Was he career, or was he political?

MOREFIELD: Cliff Wharton was the first black career ambassador. He spent a majority of his early career bouncing between consular posts in Nigeria and the Azores. He is proof that you can't keep talent from rising. He got to the top by sheer talent in spite of all of the problems of being a black in the Foreign Service in the 1920s, 30s, and 40s. He was an incredible man in many ways. You always learn something from every person you ever work for, but it has been only recently that I have realized how much subconsciously I had tried to copy many of his management skills. They were varied, and many were ahead of the times.

One was his ability to use a staff meeting for a specific purpose. He ran three distinct types of meetings. The first was to distribute information—the kind of “show and tell” that is so common in many staff meetings. The second was to grapple with a specific task, in which all the interested parties were expected to participate fully and not just to represent their special piece of “turf”. The last was to give his “core” officers daily “marching orders”.

There were two things unique about the last—the composition and the length. Unless augmented for a special reason it was the DCM and the heads of the Political, Economic and Consular sections. Each picked up a cup of coffee going in and when the Ambassador had finished his, the meeting was over. Good practice in getting to hear of the matter in a hurry. I have had other principals who used these techniques, but none were as good as Wharton in keeping them separate.

He was the best leader I have ever known in building morale and had a number of techniques. One of the most important was a sincere interest in every one at the post. He was able to win loyalty up the chain of command because it was clear that he freely gave loyalty down the chain of command. Much has been said and written about the loss of values of the “old Foreign Service”. Some changes were inevitable—and even desirable. But I have always felt that the demise of loyalty downwards in the Service has contributed much to the sense of morale loss in the past 25 years. It may have been one of the inevitable changes—an unfortunate concomitant, if you will, of the unlamented demise of the “old boy” network. But Cliff Wharton demonstrated that he cared. And he worked at it.

Q: And one of his many attributes was he knew how to deal with people, vice consuls?

MOREFIELD: Yes.

Q: Inspire them, lead them.

MOREFIELD: And he gave that kind of inspiration at a time when he could have very easily said, “I've got mine, Jack.”

Q: Maybe he felt that as an obligation that he owed to the evolving Foreign Service?

MOREFIELD: I think that's one of the reasons why I'm willing to sit here today and why I did a lot of talking to the junior officers in Mexico when I was there.

Q: Maybe, not only did he set that example to you, but he set it for the rest of the mission? They always say the spirit of the mission comes from the top.

MOREFIELD: Yes, I think so. In both Mexico City and in Bogot#, I insisted that the DCM have a first-hand knowledge of the skills of my consular officers. So that, somehow, I would get them down there, to stand behind them on the visa line, to get a feeling for how this junior officer handled this. That meant that the junior officer saw the top people. There was face, name recognition. So that, when the occasion came about, the DCM was in a position to make an independent judgment.

Q: Vital, vital observation, Dick. But they weren't Whartons. How did you con them, or convince them, to do that?

MOREFIELD: Well, that was my job.

Q: Right. How did you do it?

MOREFIELD: Cajoling. Getting them to do a walk-through. Having an occasion in which—there would be a special occasion. An awards ceremony.

Q: A little blackmail, maybe, over a visa case?

MOREFIELD: Yes. These are all ways in which you tried to do it.

Q: But that was your job?

MOREFIELD: That was my job. There's a saying. “A leader is not one who can do the work of ten. He is one who can get ten to work.” My job was to get the resources for the people who were qualified and trained to do the job; to clear away the obstacles for them; and to motivate for them to do it. And that's plenty.

One of the problems that we have in the Foreign Services is that when one becomes an ambassador or DCM you tend to take along your past job. So we have a DCM or an ambassador, who will act as the senior political officer in a post—or the senior economic officer in a post. That's not his job.

Q: You didn't do that in Guadalajara, when you became the principal officer? You didn't become the consul general, consul-consul?

MOREFIELD: No, no. Although, I did try to spend two hours a week down on the visa line, mainly because I wanted to have a feel on what the junior officers were doing and also to motivate them. I hated the common statement among consular services supervisors, “I've done my time on the line and, therefore, I . . .” Everybody in the consular service, until you get to be a CG at a very large post, is a working supervisor.

Q: Now, you found yourself doing that with the consular section. How did you bring the large consular section—I presume Guadalajara was two-thirds consular section—how did you bring that consular section into the total mission of both the embassy and what you were doing in Guadalajara?

MOREFIELD: Let's go back to why I came back to why I came to taking a consular assignment, because I think it has relevance. When I went to Stanford—to the Sloan Program, supposedly to learn management—

Q: This was right after Oslo?

MOREFIELD: No, this was right after my assignment at USOAS, and before I went to the inspection corps. I came back from this training about motivation, management, and so forth—

Q: Having been inspector for two years?

MOREFIELD: No, no. I took this before I went into the inspection corps.

Q: Oh, okay, right.

MOREFIELD: As you know, at that time the team, very rarely, had a consular officer on the team. And, generally, the inspection of the consular function was an additional duty to one of the junior inspectors, who was there because of his economic or political background.

Q: Or an auditor, perhaps?

MOREFIELD: Or an auditor. And what came out, very quickly—I think it came out for me most clearly in the inspection in Canada—it came across, very clearly, that in many countries the preponderance of our resources were dedicated to consular functions. And yet, when you looked at the goals and objectives to a mission, you never saw a word about it.

And one of the things that you learned, if you took management training, is to be concerned over where your costs are.

Q: Where your resources are.

MOREFIELD: Because it really makes a difference. To save on a minor program really doesn't matter. But if you save on where the majority of your resources are being allocated . . .

Q: If you're interested in that program.

MOREFIELD: Now, one of the things that came about was that the consular service in trying to get a handle on allocation of resources very early on established some control techniques, which, unfortunately, in my mind, were taken to the extreme.

This led to the great advantage and the ability to talk about, “We can do so many visas in so many hours.” Or so many passport cases. Or so many fraud cases.

Q: The “consular package” being a quantification of the total workload over a given year of a consular section?

MOREFIELD: Yes. The consular service got into a dilemma in that, often, the management was being driven by that package, rather than on focusing on what you should be doing. It was very, very difficult to change the allocation of resources. Where it was most clearly seen, I think, was in the training for the future.

I saw that it was clear that the consular's leadership in the field had to be of the kind that we are talking about—the kind to motivate junior officers. Because the bulk of the people on the line were going to be junior officers that were going to do it for one or two tours and then go on to something else.

Q: The bulk of the consular function is junior officers, because of this.

MOREFIELD: Yes. Secondly, they were going to be working under great stress. As you know, the first consular convention we went to together, I said, “How, as a manager, am I going to be able, in Bogot#, to help my subordinates handle the kind of stress and burnout that comes from somebody walking up that counter every three minutes, all day long, and many of them lying? How do you get over the idea that everybody is lying?

Q: And nobody supporting you as you go through this.

MOREFIELD: Yes. One way was to have a dedication to training for the future. I told Walentynowicz, who was the Administrator for Consular Affairs at that time, that I thought the consular cone was selling itself short. I said, “You've got to send your best people to things like the War College, university training, advanced management training, out of cone assignments.”

And he answers, “But we don't have enough good people. And if we do that we'll lose them.”

Q: But then Mr. Walentynowicz left for other work.

MOREFIELD: I also said that later to Barbara Watson.

Q: And she understood it?

MOREFIELD: Very reluctantly. Also she was a great advocate of the consular-designated post. My argument to her was that if you do that, that's all the assignments you're going to get. I said, “You haven't planned in your pattern of assignments to send people to the senior seminar, to send them to the inspection corps, to send them to university training. And that means that you are not preparing for your future needs, or the overall needs of the Service.”

Q: How did she respond to that, ultimately, not immediately?

MOREFIELD: Ultimately, I think there was a recognition that the needs for management in the field—for leadership in the field—required that. I said, “You say you send somebody to university training and you're going to lose them. You would have lost them anyway. And, at least, you're going to have a DCM or an ambassador who understands the consular function. Who realizes the importance of the consular function. Who understands that the tools that are developed, the resources that are available—down in that visa mill, or down in that passport section, or in that American citizen section—are skills and resources that are useful for the entire goals and objectives of the entire mission.”

Q: You must have got through to Walentynowicz because those are the exact words he used to me when he convinced me, coming out of senior training, to be the first senior inspector with consular background. [Laughter]

MOREFIELD: Unless you're willing to make a commitment to the future, all you are doing is buying time. I think you can motivate your junior officers to work flat out for a short time, if they believe that eventually you're going to solve the problem.

Q: That was 15 to 10 years ago, Dick. Now you look back at it. Have we made it or not?

MOREFIELD: I think we are in a far better situation than we were then. One of the real problems is motivation. I saw this very clearly in Mexico, where we had 15% of all junior officers start out with a consular assignment in Mexico. One out of seven junior officers, at the threshold, thinks that the Foreign Service is doing consular work in Mexico.

Unfortunately, many of them are saying, “Well, I'm an economic officer. I'm a political officer. I'll do my time in El Paso, South, or whatever it is. And then two years from now I get on.”

I made a conscious effort to try and get to every constituent post and talk to them. I said, “It's not my bailiwick. I have no ax to grind. You ought to know you can't afford to waste two years. We're a competitive service. You can demonstrate skills. You can demonstrate your ability in these assignments.”

One of the problems with a consular package was that you were forced to program every single minute. And one of the things we tried to do—not only myself, in Guadalajara, but later on, in all of Mexico—was to say, “10% of a consular officer's time should be invested in the future. He should be not only urged, he should be required, to contribute to the economic section, or the political section, or the admin section, in order to broaden the base of experience.” Basically, to get at a large post like Mexico City what I got in Barranquilla.

Q: What you're saying is that there should be, and we haven't used this word yet, more rotation. Or a more refined rotation program, especially in the first or second year.

MOREFIELD: Given the staffing pattern in Mexico City, it was hard to do a rotation pattern, in which you would get one out-of-consular assignment. The best you could do would be rotated among the consular positions.

Q: Well, you can do it.

MOREFIELD: Only if there is a conscious effort to provide—

Q: Of course, but the DCM and ambassador say, "I want every, single, junior officer coming into this post to spend six months outside of the consular section." And then starts the rotation.

MOREFIELD: The rotational program in Oslo under Cliff Wharton is a good example of what you are driving at. At that time there were four first tour officers—all in the consular section. There were three second secretaries—one in the economic section, one in the administrative section, and myself as the number two in the Consular Section. So the rotation program was a "rotation out" program as far as the consular section was concerned. This was in the early sixties, yet the Ambassador was able to insist that each of the first tour officers would get six months outside consular work, and rotation within the section. And he made it stick, despite the complaints from the Bureau of Security and Consular Affairs that he was "misusing" consular resources.

Another problem is that, for the first six months in any assignment, an officer costs you more in training than he does in the other work that you get out of him.

Q: You're saying, "costs more." But that's the very thing we're trying to buy, is that experience.

MOREFIELD: That's the point.

Q: It's not a cost, it's an advantage.

MOREFIELD: Only in the long run. In the short run, however, the training of that officer by the head of the economic section is a demand on his time.

There has to be a commitment. The demands of the Service require that part of the job of every section chief in an embassy is to dedicate part of his time to training the next generation of officers.

Q: Since you and I do not have to convince each other of this, but rather the leadership in the Department of State, and the leadership at a mission, have to be convinced of it, how does one go about it? How is it being done today, as you understand it?

MOREFIELD: I think the key person in this, very frankly, is the senior consular officer. I think the key man is—

Q: Person. [Laughter]

MOREFIELD: All right. “Man” is a non-sexist description. The key person has to be the CG. And the CG clearly has to have management skills. And he also has to have motivation skills.

Q: Some personality, too.

MOREFIELD: This does not necessarily mean that he has to be a PR type—outgoing. The example that sticks in my mind was John Moors Cabot, when he was ambassador in Bogot#.

He felt that students were an important segment that needed to be contacted. And as a result he went out in informal situations with the students. He clearly was uncomfortable with it. But because it came across that he felt it was important, the students not only respected him for it, but often were won over by the fact that he felt they were important.

Junior officers have to feel that what they're doing is important enough to have the attention of the leadership of the Service.

Q: So get us going down, but at the same time, it's bringing up, if you will, or into the mission.

MOREFIELD: One way was those occasions when I was told, “Dick, the ambassador wants to see you on X case.” I would always bring the relevant junior officer.

Q: To see how reality is, at the same time, speak.

MOREFIELD: No, more than that. I would always push them forward. It was similar to sending a junior political officer out into the field; basically, you can make a mistake and learn from it. One of the great advantages of the consular cone—and I have always remembered this—is that the decision—the advisory opinion and the writing of an opinion by a junior officer—is his or hers.

Q: He's got to defend his own action.

MOREFIELD: He's got to defend his own action and explain it and justify how he came to it. When you do that—when you stop writing the opinions and, basically, say instead, “All right, you ought to consider these factors,” and so forth—take it, and then not overwrite—

Q: This is experience in the field, in the sense of how to do it—leadership, and the role of the consular officer in the field. Your last overseas assignment was in Mexico City, as minister for economic and commercial affairs. Leaving that as your last assignment, what is your final impression, if you will, of how we're doing in that area—in the field? Because I also want to hear about the Department and what it's doing. Because you were out of consular work, in theory. [Laughter]

MOREFIELD: But the CG in Mexico—I was his best man in Barranquilla.

Q: Who was this?

MOREFIELD: Charlie Brown.

As the pattern of consular services changes—the workload changes and the demands change—the style of operation has to change overseas. You have to have people who are, basically, innovators. Who are willing to look at, not how it's been done before, but possibly—is there something that we should be doing that we are not now doing? Are we now doing things that we shouldn't be doing?

Now I believe that the nonimmigrant visa function, to a large extent, is a cruel misuse of human resources.

Q: On all sides?

MOREFIELD: Until the U.S. Congress and American society is in a position to establish an immigration law that can be managed without this cruel misuse of resources, we, unfortunately, are going to have to continue to stand in the trenches.

Q: As long as we are a magnet country, drawing particularly from Latin America, do we not have to look at them before they come?

MOREFIELD: No.

Q: Let them come to the front door?

MOREFIELD: I'm a firm believer in the national identity card.

Q: JFK and Miami Airports are going to be interesting places without visas in hand.

MOREFIELD: I know. I know. But if you have a national identity card, which will provide some kind of ability to control illegal employment in the United States—

Q: It certainly isn't going to happen in our day. It has improved.

MOREFIELD: The national identity card is only as good as the documentation underlying it. And until we have a national system of identity—of personal documentation, a national registry of births, a national registry of deaths, civil records, which are relatively uniform throughout the United States—no I.D. system is going to work.

Q: Supposedly, the most recent 1985 immigration act is working in that direction. It, supposedly, sanctions employers that have employed improperly. But, in fact, it hasn't. And, if anything, it's, perhaps, done exactly what was predicted, namely, made wonderful factories for false documents—to produce national identity cards that are substitutes for them.

But back to the original thought of this. And that is, until this—

MOREFIELD: There is going to be this continued demand for our junior officers to do a very, very difficult job. How do you preclude burnout? How do you keep people from getting, what I call, the foxhole syndrome? Where at the end of the day all they want is to get into an eight-foot ditch. Where they, believe, cynically, that there is no contact with them that doesn't have an ulterior motive.

Q: When you left Mexico City and your last assignment, albeit not from a foxhole but from a rather high position, did you not feel, maybe, it was better than 10 or 20 years before?

MOREFIELD: One reason is that somehow in the last 20 years we have taught our people how to say no without being personally involved.

Q: FSI teach this, do you think?

MOREFIELD: I don't know where it is.

Q: Better leaders?

MOREFIELD: I don't know. One of the problems is Americans like to be liked. And, consequently, if at all possible we always want to say yes. But you can say no. I saw it most clearly with one junior officer in Guadalajara, who was somehow able to be able to say to the people, “Thank you very much for wanting to come to my country. But I can't issue you the visa.” And sending the people away—

Q: Smiling?

MOREFIELD: It has to do with how you treat them. You can't take away their natural dignity.

Q: And leadership can do that. The consul general leaning over the shoulder of the vice consul, putting a few words . . .

MOREFIELD: Yes, but showing that even under the worst of circumstances—under the worst of the visa mills—you do not take away the person's natural dignity.

Q: I would say that is helping the young junior officer, knowing that he is an American. Because that is an American tradition.

Dick, you might want to wind up on the view from Washington. How do you look at how the leadership in Washington is helping this or not?

MOREFIELD: Well, there is a great dilemma. Let me put it this way. I think we're still in a transition—let's talk on the visa function. We are clearly in a transition period. The last time we had a national consensus on an immigration policy was in 1952.

Q: If then.

MOREFIELD: And we still have not worked out the dilemma facing us on refugees. And until we do, we are, basically, sticking our fingers in the dike. Let me just give you a final example.

For the first time in our history, because of the airplane, the United States is a place of first asylum. We are ill prepared in our law and our system to handle that. And my own judgement is that we are—on asylum and refugee cases—very close to the way we were in the late '20s on immigration. No matter how you define a refugee—whether it's economic, political, religious—no matter how you define the people asking for asylum, there are more of them qualified out there than we are prepared or able to accept.

So therefore, Congress and our society is going to have to make the hard decisions needed to set up a system of priorities for refugees, knowing very clearly that some of the people who are not going to make it are going to spend the rest of their lives in difficulty. Just as the potential immigrant, who was living in the ghetto in Poland in the earlier part of this century, who wasn't able to get into the United States, was also going to spend his life in trouble. That is the dilemma. The solution to political, religious or economic problems can no longer be massive migration to the U.S. And I don't think the United States should be ashamed of making choices according to its own national priorities.

Q: Just to bring it up to date, as you have. I mean, the changes that have taken place in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union—the communist world in general—has really shaken the timbers out of the definition of "refugee." Certainly, our political definition.

But, to make it even more complex, we did pass a refugee act not too long ago—four or five years ago. It defined refugees under the United Nation's definition of refugees. So, therefore, it's clearer, if you will, the difference between economic and political. Doesn't that provide, at least, a set of criteria—and I agree with you on the numbers—against which you put a number? If we have a number quota. I think the refugee act has a number quota in it.

MOREFIELD: I think we tend to be very defensive about our immigration policy. And I don't think we should be. Not only is our system open—the criteria on which the decisions are made are open—in numbers accepted, we are, very clearly, in the forefront. So therefore, I don't think we have to be defensive about it.

One of the things that is very troublesome is the question of national origins. I would argue that it very well may be in the U.S. national interest that the demographics of American society more nearly mirror that of the rest of the world. But that decision should be a conscious decision of our society and not an accident of implementing a law that was not contemplated—

Q: It's in our Constitution.

MOREFIELD: —That becomes very, very difficult to say. Because, all of a sudden, you are accused of being racist.

Q: Well, we were. Then we officially changed it. And now we're changing it back, slightly, by saying, "Well, we really kind of did the Irish in." Or, "We did the Norwegians in." Or whatever. So we tamper with it, or the Congress does, since Congress is the authority. Congress is the one, as you know. But refugees is something different. What you're talking about is immigrants.

MOREFIELD: The great influx of refugees has distorted, even more so, the pattern.

Q: Particularly because all of a sudden our definition of a refugee has changed. It used to be anyone who's a commie country is a refugee—a priori. And then we didn't know quite what to do with Latinos.

MOREFIELD: But let's put it even in starker terms. How can you justify a Soviet Jew—who has a valid visa to go to Israel, who has arrived in Vienna—how can you list him as a refugee? What is he fleeing from?

Q: I think that's a rhetorical question on your part.

MOREFIELD: Yes.

Q: You are really asking a political question, which is the definition of our refugee program. How do you distinguish a Guatemalan from El Salvadoran from a Nicaraguan from a Haitian?

MOREFIELD: Exactly.

Q: And we do.

MOREFIELD: Those are hard decisions. And those are decisions which impact on our society and are, I think, in closing, a good example of the importance of the consular function. And, very frankly, if we don't pay attention to the consular function—if we decide to allocate second-rate people to the consular function and not pay attention to is—we are going to be ill served. And, unfortunately, these things are so important that we cannot pay that price.

Q: Any other farewell words, Dick?

MOREFIELD: Very clearly, I happen to like consular work.

Q: That has come through. [Laughter]

MOREFIELD: I also believe that the junior officers, as a group, coming in today, are better prepared, better trained, better motivated, than, certainly, any other time in my career. And it's to keep that momentum that I think is the challenge for the leadership—the consular leadership—today.

Q: It's in our national interests, and if we don't, we're the ones that will suffer.

Dick, you didn't go into details on your 444 days, but you did. Because to come out with this spirit, with this motivation—and with this message to others—clearly, those captors that were there must have helped you continue to be a very sensitive and sane person. Thank you very much. Anything else, Dick?

MOREFIELD: No, that's all.

Q: Thank you very much.

End of interview